

CREATING CULTURAL AWARENESS  
IN PRESERVICE TEACHERS

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## ABSTRACT

### CREATING CULTURAL AWARENESS IN PRESERVICE TEACHERS

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This qualitative research study explores the development of cultural awareness in preservice teachers. The participants, University of Dayton juniors majoring in early childhood education, were encouraged to develop their cultural awareness through methods of culturally guided group discussion, placement in a diverse field experience and self reflection of personal cultural identity. The study questioned how class discussions of individual cultural qualities support emerging cultural awareness and how writing a cultural memoir can facilitate growth as a cultural being.

The research was triangulated with a general description of the cultural memoirs, particular description generated from video taped class discussions, and the researchers interpretive commentary. The researcher chose to examine the cultural memoirs of eight preservice teachers and contemplate the process of growth and development of their cultural awareness. Cultural development and growth among the participants was determined by finding similar systematized patterns that support an expansion of cultural beliefs and awareness. A "spectrum of cultural awareness" emerged from the data collected and was used to address the research questions. The spectrum symbolizes and supports

cultural awareness and growth as a process that is cultivated by creating schemes. The more schemes the participants developed determined where they would be categorized along the spectrum of cultural awareness. The participants made strides towards viewing the world through broader cultural lenses. The outcome of the research recommended that schools of education faculty be familiar with the different categories of cultural awareness so they will be able to aid perservice teachers in advancing their personal cultural awareness.

## DEDICATION PAGE

To my grandmother, who introduced me to human diversity and cultivated my curiosity to discover and appreciate the unique differences of each individual.

To my children, Carolann, Caleb and Claire, I hope that I can instill in you the same value and appreciation for family culture that my parents have instilled in me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION PAGE.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION OF STUDY.....	1
Background of the Problem.....	4
Purpose.....	6
Research Questions.....	8
Summary.....	9
II. SYNTHESIS OF THE RELATED LITERATURE.....	10
Changing Demographics.....	10
Historical Perspectives.....	11
Steps Towards Equality.....	12
Teachers Avoid Recognizing Cultural Diversity.....	13
Develop Knowledge Base.....	13
Developing a Deeper Understanding of Diverse Cultures....	14
Mentor Teacher Goals of Multicultural Education.....	15
Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory.....	15
Making Culturally Engaged Teaching Culturally Engaging...	16
Summary.....	27
III. METHODOLOGY.....	28
Research Design.....	28
Setting.....	29
Participants.....	29
Focus of Study: Eight Students.....	30
Procedures.....	36
Data Collection.....	39
Data Analysis.....	40

Summary.....	41
IV. RESULTS.....	42
Theme 1: Growth from Class Discussions.....	43
Theme 2: Growth from Field Experience.....	46
Theme 3: Growth from Self-Cultural Awareness.....	48
Theme 4: Previously Grounded in Cultural Awareness.....	56
Summary.....	61
V SUMMARY OF THE STUDY.....	62
Discussion.....	63
Implications.....	65
Recommendations.....	66
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX A: EDT 313 COURSE SYLLABUS .....	67
APPENDIX B: CULTURAL MEMOIR ASSIGNMENT.....	70
APPENDIX C: PERMISSION PAPER .....	71
REFERENCES.....	72



## LIST OF TABLES

### CHAPTER III.

Table 1. Helms (1990) Stages of White Racial Identity .....	21
Table 2. Banks (1987) Stages of Typology of Ethnicity .....	22
Table 3. Timpson (1995) Developmental Stages of Ethnic Identity.....	23
Table 4. Bergman's Spectrum of Cultural Awareness.....	26

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. My First Year of Teaching .....	2
Figure 2. West Point Military Ball Jill and Her Brother.....	32
Figure 3. Me and Samuel Me and Grandma.....	35
Figure 4. Photo from Justin's Senior Year Photo Album.....	50
Figure 5. Amy's Easter Egg Hunt.....	52
Figure 6. Jill Six Months Old with Busha Busha's 100 <sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration Jill and Busha.....	54
Figure 7. Justin with Mom Justin with Dad.....	60

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

The cultural demographics of our public schools are becoming increasingly more diverse. Classrooms are becoming more integrated with “children of color” (Haberman & Post, 1990). As Vivian Paley (2000) stated:

Some teachers believe that to acknowledge a child's color is to insult him or her. Well-intentioned teachers utter, “I don't see color, I only see children.” What message does this send? That there is something wrong with being black or brown, that it should not be noticed? I would like to suggest that if one does not see color, then one does not really see children. Children made “invisible” in this manner become hard-pressed to see themselves worthy of notice.

I entered my first year of teaching, 14 years ago, in an inner city multicultural classroom with the best intentions of treating everyone the same and not recognizing the differences in the “children of color.” I wanted to educate this group of children in the same manner that I taught the white children in my suburban student teaching experience (see figure 1). I had the ill-conceived notion that all children are the same and the same teaching methods work for all children. I was not going to compromise my philosophy or my teaching style. I guess I don't need to say that is was one of the worst

*Figure 1. My First Year of Teaching  
Class Photo*

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*Figure 1. My pictorial description “children of color”.*

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*Note:* From my personal cultural memoir.

experiences of my life and it made me hope no other teacher would have to experience such miserable and unsuccessful first year of teaching.

Working as a University liaison for students assigned to field experiences in diverse settings, I found myself asking the question, “ Are these preservice teachers graduating from the University of Dayton prepared to face the collective challenges of “seeing” color and the trials of teaching in multicultural classrooms. It has become apparent to me that a difficult, but fundamental goal of educational institutions should be to prepare future teachers for culturally responsive pedagogy. Universities are faced with preparing future educators to educate, manage and promote the diverse population of multicultural learners. Education students should not be faced with culture shock when they enter classrooms in the real world (Haberman & Post, 1990). The homogeneous preservice teacher population should graduate candidates who are fully prepared to teach children from linguistic and culturally diverse backgrounds (Nieto, 2000). Preservice teachers need to know how to empower ethically diverse children with knowledge in the form of curriculum content which is connected to their unique cultural heritage (Gay, 2000). The National Association for the Education of Young Children ([NAEYC], 1996) position statement suggest that, “Early childhood educators can best help linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families by acknowledging and responding to the importance of the child’s home language and culture.”

I have asked myself, "How can education programs maximize efforts to support cultural awareness? More specifically, how can the University of Dayton Teacher Education program aid preservice teachers in developing cultural awareness to meet the challenges of transforming society?"

### Background of the Problem

Many teachers believe that to acknowledge a child's racial differences is to offend him or her but in reality to ignore differences could send a message that individual distinctiveness is not worthy of attention (Delpit, 1995). Achieving a quality and fair education for all children requires the consideration of individual differences. Learning methodologies, curriculums, resource materials, and school environments can have the greatest educational impact when cultural and ethnic differences guide the decisions that affect individual children and families (Manning, 1995). Teachers can no longer view learners, design curriculum, and plan instruction that conform to the dominant cultural perspective (Manning, 1995, p.52).

It has been a long time myth in education that in order to treat all children equally you must treat all children the same. It is important to see color and if we do not acknowledge a child's individual identity it sends a message that there is something wrong with being black or brown. Children should feel that their ethnic origin is worthy of attention. As Delpit (1995) notes, color should no longer go unseen.

The responsibility of reform and preparing future educators to recognize the importance of acknowledging the unique qualities of cultural and ethnic

heritage lies in the schools of education. Teacher education programs should focus on multicultural and bilingual education. Multicultural education is a constant process of working to assure that every child has equal opportunities to learn. It requires that every student be valued and respected no matter their gender, social class, ethnicity, or race. Schools of education should model values that support a pluralistic society. The University of Dayton has adopted a theme in accordance with the University's Marianist Mission Statement that requires professors and teachers to embrace and model values of respect, acceptance, empathy, authenticity, service, and compassion. Modeling this mission statement is beginning to acknowledging the needs of future educators.

It is also imperative that teacher education programs place a high priority on providing information and resources pertaining to cultural diversity. Not only should they provide information, but they should design methods of instruction that support relevant and authentic learning for preservice teachers. The importance of recognizing and acknowledging cultural diversity in America's school systems has not been empathized enough (Manning, 1995). The vast majority of teachers are unaware of the obstacles that arise as a result of the clash between school culture and home culture. A teacher's lack of information on cultural background and heritage can cause misjudgments of student's intelligence, intentions, and capabilities. Manning (1995) suggests that teachers who are ignorant of cultural differences run the risk of implementing instruction styles that do not match the learning styles of



the student's in their classroom.

The University of Dayton has continued to make huge strides towards incorporating multicultural education into every teacher education course. In compliance with NCATE standards, the information and resources have been provided for the preservice teachers. Now the challenge becomes making the information relevant and authentic for learning. Nieto (2000) suggests the following three ways that teacher education programs can promote cultural differences and awareness: 1) University faculty should prepare students to deal with challenges of a pluralistic society and support the learning of all children. 2) Students should be encouraged to examine what is unjust in education and why some children and families are disadvantaged in schools. 3) Students should be given the opportunity to recognize their own cultural identities and economic advantage before they begin working with diverse children from varying socioeconomic levels.

From my experiences and my research, I suggest the key to improving the understanding of multicultural education lies within Nieto's third suggestion: Students should be given the opportunity to recognize their own cultural identities and economic advantage before they begin working with diverse children from varying socioeconomic levels. It appears that this condition has not been the focus of University of Dayton's education program.

#### Purpose

The University of Dayton Teacher Education Program is making an effort to meet the challenges of preparing preservice teachers to teach in



ethnically diverse populations. The students are required to take a course titled *Educating A Diverse Student Populations in Inclusive Settings*. The university is also obligated to provide a field placement in a culturally diverse setting that meets standards governed by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Experts concur that in order for these program provisions to truly be beneficial the students must first be allowed the opportunity to explore their own cultural identity (name, 2000; name, year;). Exploring self-awareness is vital because placement in a diverse setting without culturally guided discussion and self-reflection could be detrimental and reinforce initial preservice teachers' biases and prejudices (Allen & Labbo, 2001).

## Research Questions

I constructed my research questions based on what the experts agree are three essential components for growth in cultural awareness for preservice teachers (name, year; name, year;):

- Placement in a diverse field experience
- Opportunity to explore personal cultural identity
- Culturally guided group discussions:
  - 1) How will class discussions of individual cultural qualities support the emerging cultural awareness of preservice teachers?
  - 2) How will providing preservice teachers the opportunity to explore their cultural identity by writing a cultural memoir facilitate their personal cultural awareness and growth as a cultural being?

## Summary

In this chapter I discussed the importance of preparing future teachers to educate children from diverse cultural backgrounds. I have personally confirmed the devastating effects of sending a first year teacher into a diverse setting without proper information about the challenges of teaching in a pluralistic society. My study has been clearly outlined and research questions have been presented that will ask preservice teachers to explore their personal culture in a creative, and profound manner. I hope to investigate and promote the growth of cultural awareness in perservice teachers.

## CHAPTER II

### SYNTHESIS OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter will define transforming pluralistic society and how it impacts American schools and teachers. It will describe the historical perspective of multicultural education and discuss the views and opinions of four leading experts working in the field of cultural awareness. It will also examine research studies conducted in similar fashion to this research regarding preservice teachers and cultural awareness. Finally, it will explore models that categorize the process of cultural development and I will design a means to describe what I consider to be the progression to becoming more culturally aware.

#### Changing Demographics

The demographics of the United States are changing. Some projections suggest that by the year 2050 the majority of citizens will no longer be white European Americans (Lasley & Matcznski, 1997). American schools are changing as well. Future public school students will be more socially, economically and educationally diverse than ever before (Lasley & Matcznski, 1997, p.3). In 1994, the National Center for Education Statistics stated that out of the 99 largest school districts in the United States, over half had a population where more than 50% were children of color (Nieto, 2000). A demographic transformation has already taken place in most major cities and within the next 40 years, white children will be the minority race in public education (Garcia, 1997).

As the population of our society becomes more diverse, the majority of professionals entering into the teaching profession remain white European Americans (Nieto, 2000). It was estimated in 1996 that 90.7% of the nation's

teachers were white which was an increase from 88% in 1971. Throughout the same time span, the number of African American teachers in this nation has decreased from 8.1% to 7.3%, and the smaller minority categories have dropped from 3.6% to 2.0% from the years 1971 to 1996 (Nieto, 2000). As the number of minority students increases in the United States, the population of teachers remains a non-minority. There is a demographic imbalance between students and teachers (Larke, 1990).

As Larke (1990) noted, the dwindling number of minority teachers in American schools has brought about concern that white monolithic teachers are not adequately educated to manage racial and ethnic issues and teach multicultural curriculum in diverse school populations.

### Historical Perspectives

Multicultural Education originated in the 1970's out of concerns for racial and ethnic inequalities (Gay, 2000). Multicultural education can be defined as a concept that encompasses a wide variety of characteristics dealing with race, culture, language, social class, gender, and handicap (Haberman & Post, 1990). In an effort to assure that this learning environment would not continue to educate teachers with white European American values the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has set standards that call for education programs to include cultural diversity in curriculum, instruction, and field placement. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education ([AACTE], 1989) stated goals for teacher education: "1) teaching values which support cultural diversity, 2) encouraging the expansion of existing cultures as well as their incorporation into the mainstream, 3) supporting alternative lifestyles, and

4) encouraging multilingualism and multidialectism” (p.1) It is the responsibility of professors, and mentor teachers to assure that education students are leaving institutions with a firm belief and understanding of these educational goals.

### Steps Towards Equality

Nieto (2000) states, “The nations teachers have become more monolithic, monoculture, and monolingual” (p. 181). Schools and colleges share the blame for the inequality in education. Universities have been slow to implement this change and reform the programs to an extent that would have lasting impact, even though immense importance has been placed on cultural awareness, social justice, and equity in education (Nieto, 2000). Member institutions are not all complying with NCATE issued standards that require more attention be focused on diversity in field placement, curriculum and instruction. Some teacher education programs still appear to be preparing teachers to teach in classrooms from fifty years ago (Nieto, 2000).

Nieto poses the question, “How can we place equity front and center?” “Teacher education programs need to (a) take a stand on social justice and diversity, (b) make social justice ubiquitous in teacher education, and (c) promote teaching as a life-long journey of transformation” (2000, p.182). The fundamental goal is that preservice teachers enter the work force prepared to face the challenges of teaching in a culturally diverse classroom. One way to achieve this goal is to allow preservice teachers the resources and opportunities to explore their own cultural identity before they begin teaching children from diverse backgrounds (Nieto, 2000).

## Teachers Avoid Recognizing Cultural Diversity

Gay (2000) believes cultural backgrounds and ethnic identities have been ignored in the past in an effort to treat every individual equal. From Gay's viewpoint, teachers have misconceptions that it is not important to recognize the diverse cultural heritages, ethnic groups, and social classes of the children they teach.

This way of thinking stems from several of Gay's (2000) theories:

1) Education has nothing to do with diversities in ethnic origins. 2) Not many teachers are aware that their teaching styles reflect European American cultural values and they are ignorant to the cultural differences of other ethnic groups. 3) Some teachers believe that treating students differently because of their culture orientation is racial discrimination. 4) There is a belief that quality teaching is identical for all students in every situation. 5) There is a notion that the best way to facilitate the assimilation into mainstream society is for all people from minority groups to forget about being different and to share the exact same school experiences.

Learning is a contextual process that needs to be individualized and relevant for every child. It is impossible for educators to teach and nurture the individual student without recognizing ecological factors, prior experiences, cultural background, and ethnic identities that impact every child. As Gay (2000) pointed out, it is harmful to remain ignorant of people who are different from us because it breeds negative attitudes, anxiety, and fear.

## Knowledge Base

Hoffman (1996) considers that it has become increasingly important for

teachers to value cultural differences and develop positive attitudes towards individuals who are diverse. Teacher education programs must mirror the same principles of multicultural learning that should be taught in classrooms. Preservice teachers need to develop a knowledge base to explore culture so they can model the same proficiency for their future students. Building upon and constructing their own cultural identity can develop their cultural awareness and expand their knowledge base. Finally, Hoffman (1996) suggests that in order to understand culture, every individual must challenge the way they view the world.

#### Developing a Deeper Understanding of Diverse Cultures

Manning (1995) affirms educational institutions must make a commitment to work towards more equitable and unbiased educational practices based on cultural awareness. From Manning's standpoint, schools need teachers that are willing to embrace and respect students, parents, and families from all cultural backgrounds. In fact, Manning feels that preservice teachers must also understand the role that diverse parents and families play in educating the child. Achieving a comfortable instructional relationship with culturally diverse students and their parents would require preservice teachers to consider the learning methodologies, curricular materials, and the school environments of diverse learners. In the end, equity cannot be achieved unless there is an acceptance of distinct cultural differences among Native American, African American, Asian, and Hispanic American parents and families. Manning (1995) denotes that understanding these culturally different values will make it easier for preservice educators to welcome parents and families, make them feel respected and enable them to become involved in the educational process.



## Mentor Teacher Goals of Multicultural Education

Mentor teachers who work along side preservice teachers should be responsible for modeling multicultural educational strategies. Haberman and Post (1990) found it relevant to asked the question, "What do mentor teachers perceive the goal of multicultural education to be?" (p. 32). They surveyed 227 Caucasian mentor teachers who participated in a workshop at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The teachers were given a survey and asked to pick the best answer out of the five provided. The researchers found that 80% of the participants agreed that cooperation with one another and tolerance for individuals were the most important goals of multicultural education. The mentor teachers failed to acknowledge the importance of subgroups in society. It would appear that the participants comprehend the individual and the total society as the only two units worthy of study. Teachers may not grasp the concept of America as a multicultural society and they may not understand the role of group dynamics in the classroom. Haberman and Post (1990) questioned, "What educational treatments might alter this state of affairs?" (p.34).

## Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory

If mentor teachers do not grasp the importance of a multicultural education then where does that leave preservice teachers and what is the depth of the cultural awareness that they bring to the teaching profession? Larke (1990) studied the knowledge of preservice teachers using a Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory. Specifically, Larke (1990) researched the sensitivity among preservice teachers toward minorities. The female subjects of the survey were 46 Anglo Americans and 5 Mexican Americans from middle to upper socioeconomic

backgrounds. All of the participants had completed three years of undergraduate course work, which included one class in multicultural education.

The survey looked at the areas of general cultural awareness, the culturally diverse family, cross-cultural communication, assessment and the multicultural environment. Statistical analyses of the data revealed that 90% of the respondents thought that they would teach children who did not share their cultural background and 68% agreed they would not be comfortable teaching students with different values from their own. The majority of the questions dealing with parental involvement were answered in a positive manner for the most part favoring and valuing parent input. In contrast to these findings 78% of the respondents felt that parents would know little about assessment of their own children and only 45% of them felt that parents should be asked about their preferred ethnic identification. The survey also found that 45% of the participants questioned would send students for testing if they appeared to have cultural or language related learning disabilities.

Both of these research studies are quantitative in manner. The authors presented informative statistics, but as I was planning my research project I realized that I wanted to conduct and present research in a qualitative manner. Therefore, my study focuses on the cultural backgrounds of individual preservice teachers and their thoughts and feelings about their experiences in diverse field placements.

### Making Culturally Engaged Teaching Culturally Engaging

After weeks of contemplating the design of my study I came across a research article published in Language Arts Journal, which I found extremely

intriguing. The authors conducted qualitative research to examine cultural self-awareness in preservice teachers. The research was identified as, the PhOLKS Project: Photographs of Local Knowledge Sources. Allen and Labbo tried to create a profound and multifaceted understanding of culture among their students. Their concern was that few teachers from the mainstream culture are equipped to incorporate the multicultural characteristics of students and their families into their daily curriculum. This project observed preservice teachers in the process of examining their own cultures and discovering their own biases to gain a new appreciation for those who are different (2001).

I decided to model my study after the research organized by Allen and Labbo (2001). Their research sought ways to help their white, middle-class female, undergraduate students “see” their own cultures. In this study, the students were assigned to write cultural memoirs for a four-week language arts course. The students were asked to critically reflect on the people, times, places, and social issues that formed them as “cultural beings.” They were able to choose the genre in which to present their memoirs. Their memoirs could include, interviews with family members and photographs representative of their lives. The students worked in individual conferences, small groups, and whole class sessions reviewing their writing in progress. The professors assigned cultural readings, organized class discussions, and taught the importance of establishing home connections in an effort to help their students learn to respect each child’s culture (Allen & Labbo, 2001).

One intent of the course was to encourage the students to become aware of their own culture in hopes that it would encourage the students to incorporate

aspects of culturally engaged teaching in their own classrooms. The professors chose to employ a methodological tradition of participatory research, visual anthropology, and interpretive case study. They searched for patterns in the data, triangulation of key observations and alternative interpretations to develop suppositions (Allen & Labbo, 2001).

Allen and Labbo (2001) found that the first drafts of the students' cultural memoirs looked like scrapbooks more than representations of their culture. Some of their students did not understand the connotation of culture and they thought that culture was only defined by ethnic heritage. However, by the time the four-week course and culturally diverse field experience concluded the students had developed a cultural conscience. They were able to reflect upon themselves as cultural beings living in a multicultural society. They felt the final letter writing assignment lead to the deepest reflections due to the explicit connections the students made among their personal experiences. They concluded that everyone involved gained personally and professionally from the research conducted.

### Methods of Measuring Cultural Awareness

As I thought about Allen and Labbo's study I considered the design of my project and the question occurred to me, "How would I assess whether the participants in my research gained a greater sensitivity to cultural awareness?" I began to research methods of measuring cultural development and I came across an article, which discussed preservice teachers and their white racial identity. The authors Bollin and Finkel (1995) advised that there are no simple solutions to developing the cultural awareness of preservice teachers but that it is an extensive process that can not be taught in one workshop or even one course. The authors

supported their philosophy with an inventory that explains the process of cultural identity. I have formatted this inventory, Helms Stages of White Racial Identity into a table that aided my visualization of these stages (see Table 1). The model represents six stages of developing a positive racial identity that is truly nonracist and it provided me with an immense amount of information. I felt that I could possibly link some of my findings to this model but I was concerned that it would not represent the entirety of my results.

I continued to investigate paradigms for determining cultural awareness. Banks (1987), who is well known for extensive research in cultural growth, provided another model of cultural growth to use as a tool to gather information. I contemplated this theory of typology of ethnicity as summarized by Martin and Atwater (1992). Again I formatted this philosophy into a table so I could visualize and clearly think about these six stages (see Table 2). This theory provided me with more information that supported my understanding of cultural development but I was apprehensive about the narrow applications.

I reviewed a third model that represented six more stages of ethnic identity quoted by Timpson (1995). I arranged these stages in a table as well to foster my comprehension so that I could understand yet another philosophy (see table 3). This model also provided a wealth of information for measuring cultural growth but it did not correspond specifically and entirely meet the needs of my thoughts and my research. I needed a theory with an extremely broad range of implications.

I decided to utilize the three models to guide my theories and aid in designing a conceptual framework that channeled my perceptions and helped to translate my data and commentary. I created my own outline for cultural growth

translate my data and commentary. I created my own outline for cultural growth and awareness that represented more than just six consecutive stages. I felt the need to investigate a model that would be based on a sliding scale theory. A model that would follow a consecutive structure for growth, but at the same time provided a means to illustrate regression in cultural development. My theory is based on a framework that defines cultural awareness as a process of constant growth and increasing knowledge. It can be compared to Piaget's theories of child development. As McDevitt and Ormrod (2002) stated, "Children benefit only from experiences that they can relate to what they already know."

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Table 1:

*Helms (1990) Stages of White Racial Identity*

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Stage	Name of Stage	Description of Stage
1. Stage I	Contact/Naivet	Whites in the United States obliviousness to their own racial identity and a naïve belief that race does not make a difference
2. Stage II	Disintegration/ Dissonance	They progress to an understanding that race does not make a difference and become uncomfortable with the sense of privilege their Whiteness offers them.
3. Stage III	Reintegration/ Defensiveness	Typically they try to resolve their discomfort by superiority of Whites
4. Stage IV	Pseudo-independence/ Liberalism	When this belief is challenged they move to an intellectualized acceptance of racial differences and work to solve the inequities
5. Stage V	Immersion/ Self-exploration	In the next stage, Whites try to refine their understanding of their own racial identity and to gain more accurate information about the racial identities of others
6. Stage VI	Autonomy/ Transculturalism	In the final stage, they internalize a multicultural identity and actively seek opportunities to learn other cultural groups

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*Note:* From "White Racial Identity as a Barrier to Understanding Diversity: A Study of Preservice Teachers," by G.G. Bollin and J. Finkel, 1995, *Equity & Excellence in Education*, p. 25. Researcher created table to aid in visualizing theory.

Table 2:

*Banks (1987) Stages of Typology of Ethnicity*

Stage Name	Description of Stage
Ethnic psychological captivity	In which individuals act on the basis of internalized beliefs about particular ethnic groups
Ethnic encapsulation	In which people are ethnocentric and practice ethnic separatism
Ethnic identity clarification	Where people have clarified their attitudes towards various ethnic groups
Biethnicity	Where individuals have the attitudes, skills and commitment to participate in their own or other ethnic groups
Multiethnicity	Where and individual has a reflective ethnic and national identification
Globalism and global competency	Within which a person's capacity for multiethnicity transcends national barriers

*Note:* From "Conceptualizing cross-cultural curriculum development " by L. Parker, 1996, *Teaching and Learning Forum*, ¶16. Researcher created table to aid in visualizing theory.



Table 3:

*Timpson (1995) Developmental Stages of Ethnic Identity*

Stage Name	Description of Stage
Denial	Conceived as a form of ethnocentrism or parochialism
Defense	Associated with negative stereotyping and an assumption of cultural superiority
Minimization	Where differences are often trivialized
Acceptance	Where cultural differences are acknowledged and respected
Adaptation	Reflecting a culturally pluralist view and certain fluidity of world view
Integration	Where differences are perceived as an essential and joyful aspect of all life

*Note:* From "Conceptualizing cross-cultural curriculum development " by L. Parker, 1996, *Teaching and Learning Forum*, ¶16. Table created by researcher to aid in visualizing theory.

In Piaget's view, accommodation typically occurs only when it is accompanied by some degree of assimilation. New knowledge, understandings, and reasoning processes (new schemes) are typically derived from previously acquired knowledge and processes (existing schemes). Developmentally speaking, new knowledge, skills and cognitive processes don't just appear out of thin air" (p.126).

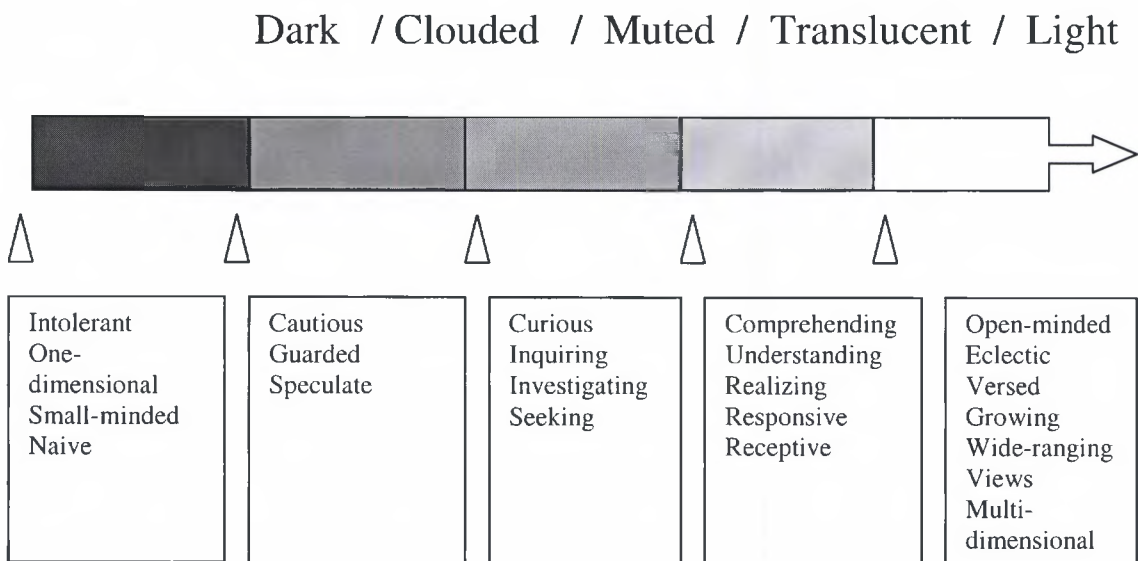
My theory suggests that the development of cultural awareness is based on developing schemes and that experiences, events, and ethnic heritage increase schemas, which in turn increase cultural awareness. Schema can be defined as a structured and internalized bit of wisdom about a particular subject (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). As I began to really delve into the theory of expanding awareness with new schemes I began to consider the fact that often times new schemas can relapse growth as well. I have observed individuals developing new schemas, expanding their points a view, and developing nicely through the continuum or the stages of cultural awareness when suddenly they are blindsided by a tragic event or circumstances that can destroy the schemas that have been constructed. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> are a prime example of how schemas can be destroyed. Some people who had grown beyond stereotyping individuals of similar ethnic heritage, now feared all people from apparent Asian decent. I felt that it was imperative to develop a framework that can represent both the growth and setback in cultural awareness.

I have designed a scale that hypothetically represents cultural awareness as a slide rule spectrum. Development of cultural awareness begins in the dark, for the purpose of this research dark is defined as culturally naïve and one-dimensional. It moves into three shades of gray, clouded, muted, and translucent.

Clouded can be defined as cautious, and guarded, muted as curious and seeking, and translucent as realizing and receptive. Finally, cultural awareness progresses in to light, defined as open-minded, growing, and multidimensional (see Table 4). The fact that my model portrays a sliding scale symbolizes that at any given point of cultural development an individual could revert somewhat or completely back to the dark.

Table 4:

*Bergman's Spectrum of Cultural Awareness*



- Dark – Destitute of knowledge having no light
- Cloudy – Indistinct confused
- Muted – Reduced Intensity
- Translucent – Permitting light to pass through understandable lucid
- Light – To come into being, beginning to accept light or illumination clarify become bright

Note: Researcher created this table to aid in visualizing theory.

## Summary

Reading background information, opinions of authorities in the field, and research studies prepared me to conduct my own research in the subject area of cultural awareness. I was excited and anxious to design my own project. I wanted my research to be qualitative in nature and focus on the development of cultural awareness in the preservice teachers that I had been teaching and observing. I decided to reconstruct similar strategies that Allen and Labbo explored in their research. After examining tools for measuring the growth of cultural awareness I designed an instrument that would assist my research in determining whether the participants expanded their schemes of cultural awareness.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study was based on Glens and Peshkin's (1992) participatory research model and was influenced by the work of Allen and Labbo (2001) from their article, *Giving It a Second Thought: Making Culturally Engaged Teaching Culturally Engaging*. My role as researcher was that of a participant observer as I actively engaged in conversation with the participants and developed my own cultural memoir to share aspects of it as a model for the participants' work. This chapter serves as a review of the methodological procedures of this project. It will include a description of the research design, the setting, the participants, the procedures, the data collection, and data analysis. A tool for considering cultural growth, *Bergman's Spectrum of Cultural Awareness*, has been created to clarify the thought process of analyzing the data.

#### Research Design

This participatory research relied mostly on analytic commentary as apposed to raw data. The research was triangulated with three different types of data: general description, particular description, and interpretive commentary (Merriam, 1998). This type of inquiry research requires the researcher to work in cooperation with the participants. This study of cultural self-awareness followed a model for participatory research. The research combined aspects of investigation, education and action from the participants. The project was guided and constrained by the goals and objectives established by the Early Childhood Education program at the University of Dayton. However, the course requirements did allow a level of

flexibility to assign each student to write a cultural memoir. The students prepared themselves to be open to the procedures that guide participatory research. They were exposed to a critical consciousness that works to improve their lives and transform societal structures and relationships (Glens & Peshkin, 1992).

### Setting

Juniors majoring in Early Childhood Education (ECE) were part of this project because they were registered for EDT 313: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Preschool, a preschool block methods course, during winter semester 2002. This course requires a preschool field placement. In an effort to provide a culturally diverse experience, the ECE program placed students in multicultural Head Start classrooms. Head Start is a federally funded early intervention program for low-income families. The students were also required to take a course in multicultural education titled, *Educating Diverse Student Populations in Inclusive Settings*. It was important to incorporate this cultural memoir assignment within the preschool block course because placement in a diverse setting without culturally guided discussion and self-reflection could be harmful and emphasize preservice teachers' initial preconceived notions and prejudices (Allen & Labbo, 2001).

### Participants

The participants for this study were the 51 juniors registered for the preschool block methods course, along with the professor, Dr. Shauna Adams, and myself, Natalie Bergman, graduate assistant working with the ECE program.

The group of students included 46 Caucasian females, three Caucasian males, and two African American females. The majority of these University of

Dayton students are from white, upper middle-class families who have not experienced a great deal of cultural diversity in their educational backgrounds. The students were informed that one assignment for this course would involve writing a cultural memoir that would facilitate my research and their personal cultural awareness. The students gave the impression that they were slightly overwhelmed by the idea of writing a cultural memoir along with all their other course assignments, but they agreed to do it. Some students were eager to participate, a few reluctant, but all cooperated in the process of self-discovery.

#### Focus of Study: Eight Students

I selected eight students and their cultural memoirs to examine more closely and think about the process of growth and development of their cultural awareness. I chose this particular group of students because they appeared to be honest, candid and sincere in their writing and class conversations. I was impressed with the depth of their commentary and the way in which I could almost visualize their thought process. I could practically see the way they were breaking down old schemas and building new more profound points of view.

#### *Martin*

Martin is quite a character being the only male in his section of the preschool block. He has a remarkable sense of humor and a very kind and loving nature with young children. Martin was raised in a small rural town surrounded by lots of extended family. He deeply values his family and his religion. He plans to return to his small town community to begin his teaching career in his parishes' parochial school. His travel experiences include a visit to Germany as an exchange student.



### *Amy*

Amy is from a diverse community, one hour away from New York City. Her ethnic origin is a combination of German, Irish, and Polish, but she really only emphasizes that she is an American born in the United States. Amy uses her perceptive abilities in a classroom to form a deep understanding of the children. She is anxious and willing to learn as much as she can before she begins her teaching career.

### *Jill*

Jill was raised in the suburbs. She enjoys traveling and she has ventured out of the country, to visit Spain and Australia. Jill has a small close nit family. She has deep-seated family values in her Polish heritage. She also values patriotism because her father served in Vietnam and her brother now attends West Point Military Academy (see figure 2).

*Figure 2. West Point Military Ball Jill and Her Brother*

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*Figure 2. Jill's pictorial description of her patriotism.*

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*Note:* From Jill's cultural memoir. Reprinted with permission of the author.

### *Andrea*

Andrea can be portrayed with a strong sense of family values. She was raised in a large family with nine children. She is very devoted to her siblings. She also values friends and the people in the rural community where she was raised.

### *Melissa*

Melissa openly described herself by writing these words on the cover of her cultural memoir, "I have love, unconditional love, spirit, strength, heart, wisdom, and a role model." She wrote smaller words sporadically on the page followed by question marks, "divorce, criticism, different, outsider, step daughter, not important, mistakes." Melissa is a quiet girl who keeps to herself during class. However, she does speak of the close friends she has made in her sorority.

### *Lindsey*

Lindsey has traveled extensively. She has visited third world countries. She recognizes the privilege to which she was born and she believes she should assist those less fortunate. She is an altruistic and empathetic individual.

### *Justin*

Justin is a compassionate and enthusiastic young man. He expresses a deep respect for the elder members of his family especially his grandparents. Justin is a thoughtful student eager to learn as much about education because of the sense of efficacy he feels towards the young children he teaches.

### *Dr. Shauna Adams*

Dr. Adams is the director of the ECE Program and is an associate professor in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Dayton. She acted as

my advisor for the project. She allowed me the opportunity to design and implement lessons and assignments that would accommodate my research question within the preschool block course. Dr. Adams supported and encouraged me in the research process.

### *The Researcher*

This was my second year working as a graduate assistant in the ECE program and as a university liaison for a number of students placed at various Head Start sites. Working with the program the previous year gave me the opportunity to brainstorm strategies that could possibly enhance the diverse field placement and allow the students to gain more personally and professionally from this experience. My position within the program paved the opportunity to design my research and form questions around this course and these students. After months of scrutinizing my study I decided to focus my energy on examining the theme of cultural awareness through cultural memoirs. My responsibility while conducting the research was to explain, motivate, model, support and analyze the process of writing cultural memoirs.

Once I decided what my focus should be, I wanted to model and write a cultural memoir along with the students. While considering my own cultural memoir I couldn't help but wonder, "What is at the root of my passion to learn about cultural diversity?" The image of an old photograph flashed in my mind. I am eight months old sitting on the shoulder of a man from Nairobi, Africa (see figure 3).

*Figure 3. Me and Samuel  
Me and Grandma*

---



*Figure 3. My pictorial description of cultural awareness.*

---

*Note:* From my cultural memoir.

My parents and I were living in an apartment above my grandmother's house and my grandmother opened her home and shared her family with several foreign students. She was fascinated by different cultures. She enjoyed learning about their family life and their traditions. Once she became aware of the poverty in their country she sent care packages to their families. She sewed clothes for the young children and shopped garage sales for items that they needed. I suppose I am like my grandmother in the fact that individuals from other countries and cultures intrigue me. I am fascinated by ethnic differences foods, traditions, music and dance. This fascination encourages me to be open-minded and gain as much knowledge as I can from other people.

### Procedures

The study began the first block class winter semester. I presented the students with the syllabus (see Appendix A). I explained one of their assignment would be to write a cultural memoir with a minimum of six entries. A cultural memoir is a written anthology of vivid or intense memories and the personal perspective of how these recollections defined one's personal cultural being (Calkins, 1986). I told the students they could choose the genre in which to organize their writing, poetry, narrative and journal. Personal photographs could be used to compliment their format. The six to eight entries should be based on personal values, family traditions, childhood memories, and how writing the memoir impacted their field experience. I knew from past experiences teaching undergraduates that these directions would not be explicit enough for them. I contemplated ways to make understanding this assignment authentic and relevant for them. Over Christmas



break I read a book, *Chasing Down the Dawn*, written and illustrated by Jewel Kilcher (2000). Jewel had written a perfect example of a cultural memoir. She wrote in different types of genre and she included her drawings and photographs. I was so excited to find a contemporary example of a memoir that would be significant to the students. We discussed the book and tied it to the expectations for this cultural memoir assignment (see Appendix B).

I explained to the students that this assignment would be used in my research study and they were given consent forms to sign (see Appendix C). The students had the choice of using pseudonyms or their own names.

### *Discussion I: Traditions*

The first of three discussions began following the formal details and directions of the assignment. I planned the discussions to inspire the type of thought that would provide the opportunity for in-depth personal reflection. The topic of our first conversation was New Years traditions. The students had just returned from Christmas break and the activity was a comfortable conversation sharing the way each person celebrated the New Year. It was interesting to listen around the room as each student shared their unique cultural traditions that they each anticipated were typical experiences for everyone in the room. The students listened intently as each individual shared their family traditions rooted in ethnic cultures, habitual routines, superstitions, and passions for America's favorite pastime. I think we were all pleasantly surprised at the wide variety of New Year's Day activities.

### *Discussion II: Community Affiliation*

The students entered the second class discussion enthusiastically and eager to learn more about their fellow block members. The discussion activity required the large group to divide into small groups based on community environment affiliation. The majority of the students were raised in suburban communities so it became a challenging task to divide the group into smaller discussion groups. The group finally agreed to divide themselves into categories of rural small town community, suburb private school community, suburb public school community, moved/changed communities, and visited other countries communities. After strategically placing themselves in their preferred groupings the students were prompted to talk about finding the similarities and differences of living and growing up in parallel environments.

### *Discussion III: Personal Values and Passions*

The students were given the choice of discussing a formal case study or sharing their personal values and passions as an activity for the third class discussion. The students overwhelmingly chose to contemplate their values and passions. Some students found this to be a complicated task because at this stage of life their focus has been school, school, and school. The majority of students valued their families, friends, and faith. It did not appear that anyone was intimidated about openly sharing with the group even if their ideals and beliefs did not follow the status quo. A few students' valued virtues like respect, generosity, courage, and compassion. They shared passions of sports, dance, music, art, photography, travel, food, and television. Everyone participated and once again



listened to their fellow classmates with what appeared to be genuine curiosity and consideration. After this third opportunity to explore and share a bit of themselves, the group seemed to be sufficiently motivated to begin to write about their personal experiences in their cultural memoirs.

The cultural memoirs trickled in slowly. Some of the students requested more time to attain photographs from home to incorporate with their writings. By the end of the semester every student had completed and turned in their cultural memoir. The students had thoughtfully and very professionally compiled a stack of heartfelt and extremely impressive memoirs. The students were required to write one entry that focused on how writing a cultural memoir impacted their field experience at Head Start. The greater part of the research data was gathered from this one required entry.

### Data Collection

Research data was collected from information generated by students in the preschool block. I gathered data from the cultural memoir assignment and three class discussions. If the students included photographs in their memoirs, these photographs provided an additional resource from which to gather data.

There were several opportunities throughout the semester for the students to write entries for their memoirs. These entries related to self-concept and growth in cultural values and experiences. Three class periods were devoted to inspiring thoughtful entries into the memoirs by discussing ethnic heritage, personal values, home communities, individual passions, family traditions and the memories that these topics rouse. I used fieldnotes as general description, describing the

participants, the events, the settings, and the conversations. Videotape was used to record particular description during class discussions. Minute details were extracted from nonverbal cues observed during interactions with the use of a video camera. The videotape allowed the opportunity to add significant detail to the fieldnotes. The transcriptions, the cultural memoirs, and the fieldnotes from class discussions provided me with an immense amount of information that was studied and analyzed as research data.

### Data Analysis

The perceptions regarding the outcomes of all measures were recorded as interpretive commentary. I coded segments of the data collected from the memoirs and photographs, fieldnotes, and transcriptions from video tape, for the purpose of finding similar themes and patterns in the cultural development. Cultural development and growth among the students was determined by finding similar systematized patterns that support an expansion of cultural beliefs and awareness. I organized what was seen, heard, and read to determine whether students had matured in their sense of cultural awareness.

I studied three models for identifying cultural development. One inventory of White racial identity was created by Janet Helms (1990). The model represents six stages of developing a positive racial identity that is truly nonracist. Banks (1987), extremely well known for extensive research in cultural awareness, provided another model of cultural growth. The third model I reviewed for the development of ethnic identity was the work of Timpson (1995), a philosophy based on six developmental stages of ethnic identity. The three models provided a wealth of information for

measuring cultural growth and aided me in creating a means to measure the cultural growth of the participants in my study. I utilized the three models to guide my theories and design a conceptual framework that channeled my perceptions, Bergman's Spectrum of Cultural Awareness. This spectrum scale helped to translate my data and commentary.

As I read through each student's cultural memoirs several times I thought about how the personal experiences and the schemes they have constructed contribute to their development, progression and regression of cultural awareness. I coded their memoirs and remarks and I placed each student along the spectrum of cultural awareness from dark to light, with the realization that any given situation could change their range of development.

### Summary

This chapter outlines a method of researching cultural awareness. It begins with an overview of the qualitative research design, the setting and the participants that I chose to investigate. The steps and procedures I employed to collect data have been clearly summarized and explained. The chapter concludes by recounting the thought process of analyzing the data and creating a tool that can measure cultural development. The results of my research will be examined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter will investigate and report the findings of research exploring the development of cultural awareness in a group of eight preservice teachers. I chose these particular individuals because their cultural memoirs, participation and comments made during class discussion represented the most significant findings. I developed a spectrum that will measure the cultural developmental phase that each participant has reached throughout this course and the assignment of writing a cultural memoir.

As I read the cultural memoirs, I thought about the ways in which these individuals were constructing and thinking about new schemas. It became obvious to me that the more schemes they developed the closer they grew to cultural understanding. Once I had read the cultural memoirs several times and transcribed video and audiotapes, I began to recognize emerging themes from the coded data. The data appeared to be centered on the way that students were able to think about new schemas and how they were able to build on previously existing schemas. The ability to activate new schemas and the ability to take old information and think about it in a new light appeared to promote cultural growth. The development of cultural growth emerged to fit into four thematic categories:

- Theme 1: Cultural growth from becoming more culturally aware from classroom discussions and learning from fellow classmates and themselves.
- Theme 2: Cultural growth experienced by observing the differences and the commonalities between the Head Start children and themselves.

- Theme 3: Cultural growth from thinking about their own cultural identities and experiences.
- Theme 4: Cultural growth students had already experienced from community service, extensive travel, and a variety of cultural experiences.

### Theme 1: Growth from Class Discussions

One theme that became noticeable from reading the cultural memoirs was how the class discussion encouraged the students to become more culturally aware of themselves and others. The primary goal of the class discussions was to encourage the students to develop a sense of cultural self-awareness. The students did learn about themselves, but they were also fascinated and intrigued by the accounts of their fellow classmates, which was an unanticipated outcome that resulted from sharing personal anecdotes. It stands to reason that it would be impossible to appreciate the uniqueness of your own personal cultural experience if there was nothing to hold in comparison.

The second class discussion was based on dividing the class into similar community environments and it provided a catalyst for small group conversations. The discussions encouraged students to build on existing schemas and at the same time learn new schemas from their classmate's experiences.

#### *Rural Small Town Community*

Martin, and Andrea were both raised in rural settings. Their group became instantly bonded by their similar accounts of growing up in the country. They talked on and on about the hardships and benefits of living in a small rural town. They did not imagine that they would have so much in common. The group quickly

determined that no one had a graduating class bigger than 100 students, and a favorite event at the high school was tractor day when everyone drove a tractor to school. They discussed the inconveniences of well water, emergency rescue response and sharing telephone lines. They talked about everyone needing water softeners, the conservation of water required during dry spells, and the troubles of running the washer or flushing the toilet while someone was showering. The class laughed as Martin explained, "Now that I'm at UD my hair is much softer and my clothes are so much cleaner; these things people take for granted." The class also got a kick out of the fact that Martin's mom had to drive him trick or treating. The rural group agreed that the most amusing thing to do on a Friday night after the football game was vandalize, toilet papering, egging, and soaping. Another topic discussed was frequent power outages. Martin said, "My dad got tired of it so he bought a huge generator. He plugs it in and the lights run dim." Andrea added that her family also had a generator.

The group discovered that there are no strangers in a small town. Andrea said, "You know everyone's brothers and sisters and you recognize any strange cars that drive through town." They also established that every rural community has at least one church, one bar and one annual festival celebrating some sort of agricultural resource. Martin's town has a melon festival and Andrea's town has a pork festival with its' very own pork queen. The rural students definitely formed a special union after they realized the mutual resemblance of their childhood experiences. The group was laughing and enjoying the conversation so much that the other groups were somewhat envious that they did not grow up in the country.

### *Visited Other Countries Communities*

Lindsey, Justin, Jill, and Amy were members of the group that had either studied abroad or traveled out of the country with their families. Each student spoke of an eye opening experience and the distinctions that made the biggest impression on him or her by visiting a new culture. Lindsey talked of her trip to Africa. She said, "In third world countries big towns are less than our worst ghettos." She was astonished that young children begged for pencils and writing utensils instead of candy. Justin spoke about his experience as a student in Ireland the previous semester. He was overcome by the caring and compassionate nature of the Irish community. His semester began the week after the tragedy on September 11<sup>th</sup>. He told of how the people would sit him down and discuss where he was and how he felt that dreadful day. He loved the generous and accommodating nature of the culture.

Jill spent a month traveling all through Australia. She was surprised that even though the country is thousands of miles away the culture is still very similar. She recognized that the Aborigine culture was very separate from the dominant Australian culture. She discovered that there is a prejudice against them and they are not respected. There was even the question of why anyone would want to learn about the Aborigines.

Amy shared with the group the similarities of traveling abroad and living so close to New York City. She enjoys the fact that she can go into the city and get a sense of so many different cultures within one geographical location.



## *Moving Changing/Community*

Melissa was the only student of the eight who classified herself as a member of the moving and changing communities. She sat very quietly and listened as the other students talked about the impact that moving has made on their lives. She only participated in the conversation when pressed to talk about the ability to stay in contact with friends after moving. She said, "It is hard to stay connected to friends because you move and then they move and you lose track of where they are." She also wrote about moving in her narrative style cultural memoir. The following is an excerpt from her writing:

Moving is a scary thing. I've never been away from 3129 Beckle St. That is my home. Grandma, Grandpa, Aunt Lydia, and Uncle Stan all live there. They are all I know. Now Daddy says we have to move to North Dakota because of his job. I don't want to leave my friends behind. Who's going to buy me White Castle's in the morning for breakfast or bring me Jell-O?

I feel the entire class was able to benefit from the discussion experiences. Everyone was able to add to or build new schemas about living in different communities by connecting new knowledge from the personal stories and experiences of their classmates.

### Theme 2: Growth from Field Experience

Past childhood memories motivated a small number of students to compare their experiences, the similarities and the differences, to the children at Head Start. The students seemed startled by the discoveries they began to make. Andrea wrote



about the rewards and complexities of growing up in a large family. She established that some of the children in her field placement are growing up in similar environments as she did, encircled by several siblings. Andrea stated the following in her cultural memoir:

Since starting the process of making a personal cultural memoir I have become astutely aware of the differences between my own life and the lives of the students at Head Start. However, what is most fascinating to me are the similarities that we share. Who would've thought that I would have anything culturally in common with impoverished African American children? I mean, to be completely honest, I am exactly the opposite of that profile: upper-middleclass Caucasian adult. There was no reason to suspect that I would find myself identifying with the experiences and histories of the children I would soon teach.

The assigning of this reflection on my own values and morals due to my culture has put many things in perspective for me. I was born in a large family, third child of nine, to a strong faith-based Catholic family. I see the same type of faith rearing in the Head Start Program. The parents of the students, however, aren't Catholic, they are primarily Baptist. The faith beliefs that they instill in their children contain the same kind of fervor and importance as my own.

Reading this entry I could almost see the process of Andrea reconfiguring her old schemas and building new schemas from information she has gained from working at Head Start. I would place her on the spectrum of cultural awareness

between the range of muted to translucent. She is beginning to break down previous beliefs and starting the course for analyzing new ones. I feel optimistic that she will continue to develop through the spectrum of cultural awareness because of the excitement and enthusiasm she verified by constructing new information.

Amy wrote about the differences she had observed in the children at her Head Start site. She noticed they danced differently. She was interested in learning about their style of dancing and sharing her style with them. She wrote that the students were interested in the fact that her hair is blond and curly. They questioned why her hair was so different from theirs. Amy is beginning to build new schemes, accumulating and sharing more information.

Other students who focused on the parallels and the variations within themselves and the students from Head Start appeared to begin to relate to the children with insight and understanding. These students were actively seeking out information about these children. They were exhibiting a desire to assemble and enhance their concepts.

### Theme 3: Growth from Self-Cultural Awareness

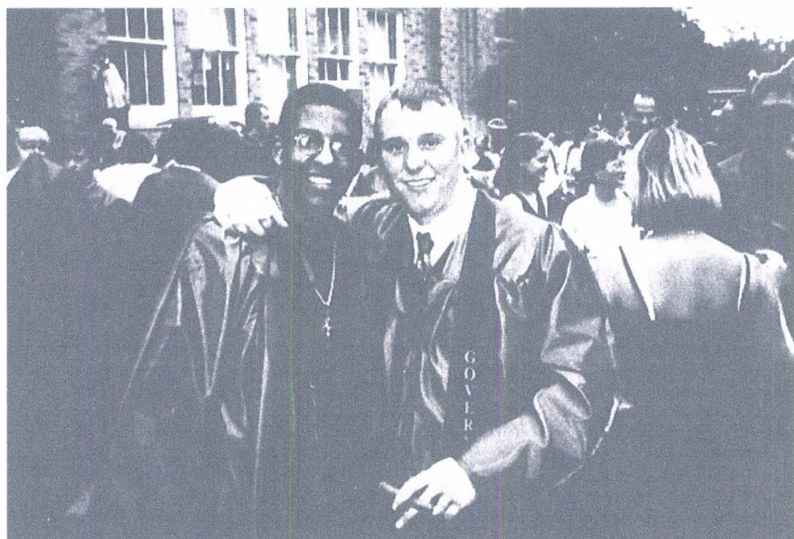
Most of the cultural memoirs fell under the theme of learning more about cultural awareness by thinking about their own cultural identities, influences, and experiences. Justin, Amy, Jill, and Martin reflected on their individual experiences and explored their culture in their writing. Justin wrote about an experience his first year at college. The following excerpt reflects his college experience:

One of the most shocking realizations that I had freshman year was when I was letting some of my new friends look through my senior year photo album. When they saw graduation pictures, they saw me in my cap and gown with a cigar in hand, and my arm around some of my African-American friends (see figure 4). I recall one person saying to me, “You went to school with black people?” HA! Or should I say WOW? From then on, I came to see that many of the students that I was attending class with were much the same way.

Justin has written an example of how not all cultural schemas are constructed in a positive direction. He found for himself that people can have biases and prejudices that do not represent his beliefs.

*Figure 4. Photo from Justin's Senior Year Photo Album*

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*Figure 4. Justin's pictorial description of his culture.*

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*Note:* From Justin's cultural memoir. Reprinted with permission of the author.

Amy has experienced many different cultures. However, it was not until this cultural memoir assignment that she took the time to think about her own.

Amy wrote the following in her cultural memoir:

The first time I thought of the word tradition within my family I had drawn a blank. I did not think that my family had any type of traditions. However, the more I thought about it, the more I began to realize that my family has many traditions. One tradition that I remember was the Easter egg hunts that we had every year at my house. Every year my mom would fill plastic eggs with stickers, change, and candy, and hide them in our backyard. My sister and I would invite all our friends over to join us. After our egg hunt was over we would sit around and open our eggs together. We would trade with our friends for items that we wanted. During this time, my mom would take a picture of all of us. My friends still talk about the fun times we had at the Easter egg hunts at my house. Learning about my culture has helped me take notice of other cultures, the differences and the similarities (See Figure 5).

*Figure 5. Amy's Easter Egg Hunts*

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*Figure 5. Amy's pictorial description of tradition.*

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*Note:* From Amy's cultural memoir. Reprinted with permission of the author.



This is a perfect example of taking an existing schema and beginning to look at it in a new light. What was once considered a typical annual event has now been categorized into a new schema of unique family tradition. Amy has looked deeper to realize something extremely special about this occasion. I would place Amy along the spectrum of translucent moving towards light. She is extremely receptive to new points of view and she welcomes further knowledge. I would estimate that a few more experiences will situate her within the light category of the spectrum.

Jill took time in writing her cultural memoir to reflect on how her family culture and heritage, which has been passed down from generation to generation. Jill wrote the following:

My great-grandmother, Busha, has introduced all of the cultural traditions in my family to me (see figure 6). Busha means grandmother in polish. In 1802, when Busha was only six months old, she traveled to America from Poland through Ellis Island. Now, Busha is 100 years old and she is still teaching our family everything we know about our heritage. Every year, our family goes to church, St. Stanislaus, for a polish festival. We listen to polish music, dance to the polka, delicious food. My favorite dishes include cabbage and dumplings, and eat pirogues, and sauerkraut. During holidays, it is a tradition that we make duck soup and eat it before dinner is served. Although I haven't exactly acquired a taste for duck soup, it is one of Busha's favorites and our holidays wouldn't be the same without it. Busha has done an amazing job of keeping our cultural heritage alive and well in our family and passing down a wealth of knowledge through five generations.

*Figure 6. Jill Six Months Old with Busha*  
*Busha's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration Jill and Busha*

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*Figure 6. Jill's pictorial description of her culture.*

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*Note: From Jill's cultural memoir. Reprinted with permission of the author.*



Learning about my own cultural background has impacted my field experience. Head Start. I have definitely become more interested in learning about all the cultural backgrounds of my students in my room. I have also learned not to assume anything about anyone.

Jill has been building this rich schema in her mind for years. This is not new information. However, what is new to her is comparing this cultural schema to other cultures. Now because she appreciates her rich heritage she wants to learn more about others. I believe Jill can be positioned in the beginning phase of light. She has obviously come to the point of realizing, her views have become open-minded and she is continuing to grow.

Martin, like Jill also wrote about a family member who has greatly impacted his life.

The person who has most affected me as a person is my father. It is his compassion, humor, religious devotion, social skills, and hard working philosophy that have formed me into the man I am today. As a young boy my father instilled these values in me by taking me to church and work with him.

Martin is beginning to think about his own cultural identity, experiences, and influences that define him as a cultural being. I see Martin somewhere between clouded and muted gray on the spectrum of cultural awareness. Often times he seems guarded and other times he is very inquisitive and open to ideas that broaden his point of view.

Similar cultural memoir entries documented fascinating family traditions, the importance of faith and family bonds, and many wonderful childhood memories. After closely examining the influences and inspirational events in their lives the students overwhelmingly expressed a striking desire to learn more about others and broaden their cultural consciousness.

#### Theme 4: Previously Grounded in Cultural Awareness

Some of the students that I chose to concentrate on entered the course firmly grounded with an understanding of diversity. Their cultural memoirs revealed higher levels of cultural awareness. Lindsey has traveled extensively and volunteered in many community service projects. Her writing suggests that she has a deep insight into diverse culture:

People often talk of life-altering experiences. One of the most amazing adventures I have ever had was a family trip taken to Africa. This consisted of going on many safaris, as well as getting a chance to visit some of the African tribal reservations. It was at these habitats that my eyes became open to a very different lifestyle. The tribal reservations consisted of houses made of animal excretions, mud, grasses and branches. Many of the people of this village were extremely underweight and under-clothed. One of the most shocking sights to me was a young infant in one of the houses covered in flies. Upon asking a man about her, he said that she was lucky for she was a survivor.

I've been given the chance to immerse myself in many different cultures, through travel, and through having spent a summer living in Ireland, I have learned how different the lives of others are from my own, and have learned to respect these differences. Diversity has also been present in my life through the many organizations and activities in which I have taken part. These endeavors have opened my eyes to the injustice and inequality in our world and have caused me to yearn to do my part in some way to help out.

Reading Lindsey's cultural memoir revealed that she has had many opportunities to build different schemas. If I were to place her on the spectrum of cultural awareness she would be in the vicinity of light. She is now open minded and eager to continue learning more from other cultures.

Justin and Melissa wrote about many life occurrences that have helped them to visibly define a profound sense of themselves and others around them. Their vast wisdom gained from a variety of experiences was passionately portrayed in their writing.

The following excerpt from Melissa's writing, reflects her feelings:

People get divorced all the time. It's not an uncommon thing to hear anymore. But you are never prepared for it. My parents have been divorced for almost five years now. The wounds that were first present are still here today. Divorce still effects me

now. I see how my parent's relationship was and what it is like

now. How can you prevent a thing like that from happening?

Writing a cultural memoir allowed Melissa the opportunity to write about feelings and look at situations within her own life that often times were shoved aside. She seemed to realize the need to look deep within herself and think about her own feelings. It is difficult to place Melissa on the spectrum of cultural awareness because she fluctuates from one end of the spectrum to the other. This is understandable and it is why my scale allows for fluctuation. Melissa appears to be cautious and guarded and at the same time I know that her experiences allow her to view others with an open-mind. She is multidimensional and cannot really be categorized within one stage of cultural development.

On the other hand, Justin seems to be in the zone of light on the spectrum of awareness. He wrote about the devastating experience that divorce had on his childhood. It could be argued that the experience was beneficial to him because it built many new schemas for him and provided him with enormous amounts of information about himself and others.

You know how to shock the hell out of an eleven-year-old boy in eight words? "Your father and I have decided to separate.

That's how.

I'll never lose the memory of playing catch with my dad in our side yard on that warm evening, life just gliding by with no worries in the world, then going inside to "talk" with my mom and

sister. MY parents? There must be some mistake here (see figure 7). Hold on. Pinch me, will you please? This is just a cruel joke, right?

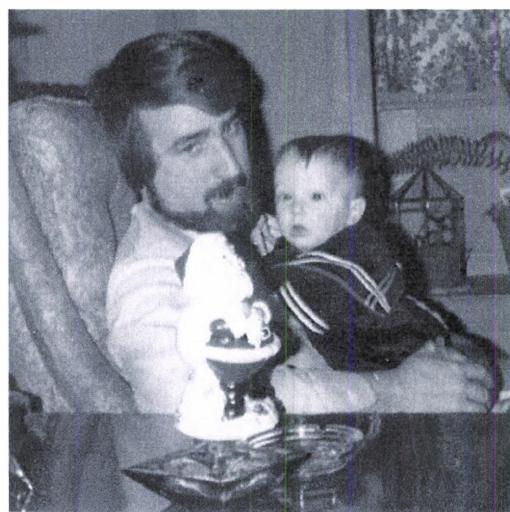
Argument after argument, hang up after hang up...I know they tried hard to leave us out of it, but is that really possible? It wasn't our fault and they told us that over and over and we knew it. But what could we do to fix things? Please, we'll do ANYTHING!!!

Reflecting on my cultural background has not impacted my Head Start field experience to an extremely noticeable point. I have always held my cultural experiences relatively close to the front of my mind.

The students who appeared to be grounded in cultural awareness wrote about a multitude of experiences that have impacted their lives including death, divorce, illness, and abuse. These experiences revealed characteristics of compassion and empathy for others even though sometimes the reverse can occur. People can become closed down and unwilling to view situations with an open mind. The collection of cultural memoirs that I read signified the positive effects that life's experiences good or bad can offer.

*Figure 7. Justin with Mom  
Justin with Dad*

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*Figure 7. Justin's pictorial description of his family life when he was younger.*

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*Note:* From Justin's cultural memoir. Reprinted with permission of the author.

## Summary

This research study appeared to have positive outcomes for the participants. Whether the steps of cultural awareness were immense or minute every participant seemed to develop a deeper sense of their cultural being and in doing so developed a desire to learn more about other cultures. The students who already exhibited multicultural growth and understanding had moved beyond the desire to learn more about other cultures to thinking about what they can learn from diverse cultures. The participants made great strides towards viewing the world through broader cultural lenses.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

I conducted a research study that investigated the cultural awareness and development of preservice teachers. The motivation for the research was the personal inadequacies I felt as a first year teacher working with a diverse student population. I was able to accomplish this investigation with the help and cooperation of the students and faculty from the University of Dayton's Department of Teacher Education. My research was based on the premise that, "It is the teacher who does not acknowledge her own racial or ethnic identity.... who will not recognize the need for children of color to affirm their own" (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997, p. 179).

My study included the following three elements, which experts agree must be present in order for cultural growth to occur in preservice teachers (Bollin & Finkle, 1995; Allen & Labbo, 2001).

- 1) Preservice teachers must participate in a field experience in a diverse setting.
- 2) Preservice teachers should be given the chance to explore various cultures through large and small groups discussions.
- 3) Perservice teachers need to be allowed the opportunity to reflect on their own cultural identities by writing and expressing their thoughts, feelings and encounters in cultural memoirs.

My research study met these requirements within the goals and objectives of a Preschool Methods course in which the participants were enrolled. The



participants were placed in a diverse Head Start classroom once a week, they were given the opportunity to share cultural experiences in three class discussions and they were assigned to write a personal cultural memoir. The constraints that guided my research gave the participants a chance to contemplate their own cultural background and the means to explore their personal cultural awareness.

A “spectrum of cultural awareness” emerged from the data and was used to address my research questions. This “spectrum of cultural awareness” was supported by and extended the knowledge base in my review of the literature. It was used to determine whether the field placement, class discussions, and the process of writing a cultural memoir facilitated the personal cultural awareness and growth of preservice teachers. My spectrum of cultural awareness symbolizes and supports cultural awareness and growth as a process that is cultivated by creating schemes. The more schemes a person develops can determine where he or she will be classed along the spectrum of cultural growth.

## DISCUSSION

I have come to the conclusion that the majority of the participants benefited from the practice and implementation of my research. The cultural memoirs of the 51 preservice teachers reflected data that prompted me to believe that they learned more about themselves and their classmates. I believe that the experience encouraged the participants to become more objective observers within their Head Start field placements. They became eager to learn from their students and primed to recognize the differences and similarities

between themselves and the students. This exercise was significant because it allowed the preservice teachers an occasion to consider how they will incorporate family culture into their own classrooms. They were encouraged to broaden their points of view and enhance their future teaching practice.

I chose to focus on eight preservice teachers whose commentary and cultural memoirs provided for fascinating and remarkable insight into their character. I felt the writing in these cultural memoirs reflected sincerity and honesty. I specifically acknowledged these participants because of the broad perspective they contributed to the research through their gains in cultural awareness or the previous experiences that defined their cultural being.

Focusing on my own cultural growth and the cultural growth of eight preservice teachers allowed me the opportunity to scrutinize the path that leads individuals to their current status on the continuum of cultural awareness. It helped me to realize that every individual is embarking on his or her own personal journey towards being a more open-minded and multidimensional individual. As an instructor I gained an immense amount of information from reading the cultural memoirs. I realized that cultural enlightening experiences appear to advance individuals through the continuum of awareness. The personal implications of this realization are my thoughts of expanding my experiences and the experiences of my own children, through the means of travel, and volunteering to serve the community.

My research supported the recognition of personal cultural identity and promoted the growth of cultural awareness in the preservice teachers. It

provided me with a deep insight into each individual's cultural growth. The research study assisted the preservice teachers in discovering their own cultural individuality and it provided me with the information to support them in realizing the opportunities, the resources, the advantages and possibly the disadvantages they have encountered from their community, ethnic heritage, socioeconomic class and life experiences in which they were raised. The preservice teachers were encouraged to understand the character of their own identities so they can begin to appreciate the enormous benefits of serving children from diverse backgrounds.

### IMPLICATIONS

Preservice teachers need to be assisted and taught to view diversity in the classroom as a benefit and not an obstacle to overcome (Manning, 1995). Teacher education programs need to offer occasions that allow preservice teachers to recognize the enormous pool of resources, that each future student and family will bring to the learning environment (Manning, 1995). Schools of Education faculty need to be familiar with the different levels of cultural awareness and help their students advance through the spectrum regardless of the point at which they begin. Cultural education for preservice teachers should be continuous throughout their program. Respecting cultural differences is something that cannot be taught in a workshop or even one course (Bollin & Finkel, 1995; Larke, 1990). Diversity training needs to be integrated into every course curriculum and it needs to be supported by in class discussions or online conversations.

Topics of discussions should center on ethnic heritage, social issues, personal values, home communities, individual passions, and family traditions.

Every preservice teacher should be required to investigate his or her own personal culture and characteristics by writing a cultural memoir. The cultural memoir assignment should coincide with a required diverse field placement. If these three requirements are met within the course work designed for preservice teachers there will be the immense probability for individual cultural growth and development.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be beneficial to continue to investigate the tool in which I measured the process and growth of cultural awareness, Bergman's Spectrum of Cultural Awareness. It would be valuable to examine whether or not my spectrum is a viable and practical way to view the growth of cultural understanding. Future research should explore and test the theory that the course of creating schemes encourages positive and sometimes negative cultural growth depending on the nature of the event or experience that triggered building the new scheme. It is important to know how preservice teachers investigate and manage new cultural information because the face of public education is changing. Present teachers and future teachers need to be adequately prepared for a diverse work place. If we begin to understand the development of cultural awareness then we can begin to assist teachers in recognizing the significance of culturally responsive pedagogy.

## APPENDIX A

### EDT 313 Syllabus

- I. COURSE NUMBER: EDT 313
- II. COURSE TITLE: Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Preschoolers
- III. TERMS OFFERED: Winter
- IV. CATALOG DESCRIPTION: This course focuses on integrated curriculum and instructional practices for young children ages three through five in the following Ohio Curriculum Model subjects areas: science, social studies, math, art, music and movement and foreign language. Students will expand their ability to use and explain developmentally appropriate methods that include child directed play, small group learning, and inquiry based learning experiences to help young children develop intellectual curiosity, solve problems, and become effective members of a learning community. Other course topics include: communication with families; home culture and diversity; child observation and documentation; guiding behaviors and integrated curriculum.
- V. ACADEMIC CREDIT: 6 Semester Hours
- VI. PREREQUISITES: EDT 211; EDT 212; and EDT 341
- V. COURSE GOALS
  - A. To expand the early childhood educator's base of understanding about learning and development of children ages three through five years.
  - B. To become part of an effective learning community including peer colleagues, mentor teachers, and families and children from diverse cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds
  - C. To reflect on course content and classroom/field based experience to make developmentally appropriate decisions that meet the needs of the children and families being served
  - D. To develop an understanding of the Ohio Curriculum Models and National Standards that apply to preschoolers.
  - E. To expand the early childhood educator's understanding of effective pedagogy across a spectrum of economic, social, cultural, ethnic, and religious environments
  - F. To collaborate with mentor teachers, student partner, student team, course instructors and field supervisors to evaluate student performance using NAEYC Competencies and components of the Pathwise evaluation system.

## VI. COURSE OBJECTIVES (Pathwise Domains are listed in parentheses below)

### A. Child Development and Learning

1. Expand knowledge of how children develop and learn to provide opportunities that support the physical, social, emotional, language, cognitive, and aesthetic development of preschoolers. (A-4)
2. Use knowledge of how young children ages three through five differ in their development and approaches to learning to support the development and learning of individual children. (A-3) (C-3)
3. Apply knowledge of cultural and linguistic diversity and the significance of sociocultural and political contexts for development and learning; recognize that children are best understood in the contexts of family culture, and society. (A-1)
4. Affirm and respect culturally and linguistically diverse children, support home-language preservation, and promote antibias approaches through the creation of learning environments and experiences. (A-1) (B-1)

### B. Curriculum Development and Implementation

1. Plan and implement developmentally appropriate curriculum and instructional practices, based on knowledge of individual children, the community, and curriculum goals and content in the areas of social studies, math, science, art, movement and music, and foreign language. (A-4)
2. State the rationale for developmentally appropriate methods that include play, small group projects, open-ended questioning, group discussion, problem-solving, cooperative learning, and inquiry experiences to help young children develop intellectual curiosity, solve problems, and make decisions. (C-4)
3. Develop and implement meaningful, integrated learning experiences, using the central concepts and tools of inquiry in curriculum content areas, including language arts mathematics, science, social studies, art, music, and movement and foreign language. (A-3) (C-3)
4. Develop and implement an integrated curriculum for children ages three through five that focuses on children's needs and interests and takes into account culturally valued content and children's home experiences. (A-4) (C-2)
5. Develop and evaluate topics of study in terms of conceptual soundness, significance, and intellectual integrity and to create, evaluate, and select developmentally appropriate materials, equipment, and environments for children three through five. (A-5)
6. Plan, evaluate and demonstrate appropriate use of technology with young children. (A-2)
7. Create and modify environments and experiences to meet the individual needs of all children ages three through five including children with disabilities, developmental delays, and special abilities. (B-3)
8. Use individual and group guidance and problem-solving techniques to develop positive and supportive relationships with children, encourage positive social



- interaction among children, promote positive strategies of conflict resolution, and develop personal self-control, self-motivation, and self-esteem. (B-2) (B-4)
9. Incorporate knowledge and strategies from multiple disciplines (e.g., health and social services) into the design of intervention strategies and integrate goals from IEPs (Individual Education Plans) into daily activities and routines. (C-4) (C-2)
  10. Maintain physically and psychologically safe and healthy learning environments for children ages three through five. (B-5)
  11. Expand understanding of the influence of the physical setting, schedule, routines, and transitions on children ages three through five and use these experiences to promote children's development and learning. (C-3)
  12. Expand understanding of the developmental consequences of stress and trauma, protective factors, and resilience, the development of mental health, and the importance of supportive relationships. (D-2)
  13. Describe basic health, nutrition, and safety management practices for young children ages three through five including procedures regarding childhood illness and communicable diseases. (B-5)
  14. Use appropriate health-appraisal procedures and recommend referral to appropriate community health and social services when necessary. (C-3)
  15. Recognize signs of emotional distress, child abuse, and neglect in young children and know one's responsibility and the procedures for reporting known or suspected abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities. (C-3)

#### C. Family and Community Relationships

1. Respect parents' choices and goals for children and communicate effectively with parents about curriculum and children's progress. (D-4)
2. Involve families in assessing and planning for individual children, including children with disabilities, developmental delays, or special abilities. (D-4)
3. Support parents in making decisions related to their child's development and parenting. (D-4)
4. Observe how the case-manager links families with a range of family-oriented services based on identified resources, priorities, and concerns. (D-3)

## APPENDIX B

### **Cultural Memoir Assignment**

**EDT 313**

**Winter 2002**

"[i]t is the teacher who does not acknowledge his/her own racial or ethnic identity...who will not recognize the need for children of color to affirm their own" (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997, p.179). If teachers lack personal cultural awareness their ability to incorporate the children's family culture into their classroom will be lacking. Therefore, in an effort to gain personal cultural awareness, the students in EDT 313 will be writing personal cultural memoirs. Natalie Bergman, Graduate Assistant for the Early Childhood program, will be guiding this assignment and using the information and data gathered from this project to write a master's thesis about cultural awareness in preservice teachers.

#### **Cultural Memoir (Individual Assignment)**

*Cultural Memoir – A written anthology of vivid or intense memories and the personal perspective of how these recollections define one's personal cultural being.*

In an effort to gain personal cultural awareness, the students in EDT 313 will be writing personal cultural memoirs. Natalie Bergman, Graduate Assistant for the Early Childhood program, will be guiding this assignment and using the information and data gathered from this project to write a master's thesis about cultural awareness in preservice teachers. Hopefully the data generated by this assignment will help to answer the question, "How does the process of creating a personal cultural memoir encourage cultural awareness in preservice teachers working with diverse student populations in a Head Start field experience?"

#### **Requirements:**

- Creative – Students can choose genre, format, photographs, and drawings.
- Thoughtful and Professional
- Word Processed – Preferred but not essential
- **1 Mandatory Entry** – Consider how learning about your cultural background has impacted your field experience at your Head Start site:

#### **Other Possible Topics for Entries**

- Reflect on the community and environment in which you were raised.
- Reflect on two or three of your most important values.
- Discuss your passion and reflect on the rationalization for passion.\
- Discuss family traditions, cultural traditions and heritage.
- Reflect on what defines you as a person.
- Reflect on childhood memories.
- Reflect on someone who has been a big influence in your life.

#### **Rubric:**

- 7-8 entries    A
- 5-6 entries    B
- 3-4 entries    C



## APPENDIX C

Everyone must write a personal cultural memoir. However, there are 3 options from which to choose:

- 1) I choose to write a cultural memoir that cannot be used in any manner for educational research or publication.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)                      (Date)

- 2) If a pseudonym is used in place of my name, I give permission for my cultural memoir to be used in educational research and publication.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)                      (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Pseudonym)

- 3) I give permission for my name and my cultural memoir to be included in educational research and publication.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)                      (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Pseudonym)

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